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**THE DRAGON AWAKENS: CHINA FACES INSTABILITY AND  
UNCERTAINTY AS IT ENTERS THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**The Dragon Awakens: China Faces Instability and Uncertainty as it Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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As The People's Republic of China itself emerges from a 30 year period of pseudo-isolation and it attempts to exert more regional influence by taking a more active roll in the economic and geo-political affairs of the South Asian region. This activism is due in part to two historical factors. The first is its attempt to maintain its internal tranquility (security) by limiting external influences, and the second, closely related to the first, is the attempt to reestablish itself as a regional hegemony by placing itself in positions so as to be able to influence the security, economic, and political affairs of its neighbors – in essence making itself an indispensable part of regional security structure. The intent of this paper then, is to examine recent events in the region and determine, based on Chinese history and stated national policy goals, what potential conflicts may develop between the PRC and the US as we pursue our growing relationship with China. In order to do so, this paper will explore China's historical national security goals; its recent policy and attempts to maintain internal stability; its recent actions pursuant to its neighbors to the south and the South China Sea, Japan and finally, to examine potential hot spots in East Asia that could have a direct impact on US-Sino relations.



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## THE DRAGON AWAKENS: CHINA FACES INSTABILITY AND UNCERTAINTY AS IT ENTERS THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

### Introduction

For most of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the primary focus of US foreign policy and national security strategy was centered on the Soviet Union; initially containing the spread of communism and, eventually, under the Reagan Administration, to roll back any gains made by the USSR thereby destroying it. As such and with few exceptions – notably Korea, Vietnam, Nicaragua and Afghanistan, which were fought as wars of proxy by one side or the other, the major focus for all of our foreign policy efforts was centered on Europe and the USSR. Little thought was paid to Asian affairs. As the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century set and the last vestiges of the Soviet Empire withered on the vine, American policy makers eagerly anticipated stability they felt such an event was sure to bring. As we know, things have not quite worked out that way. In fact, as we enter the Second Millennium, it seems our attention has now been drawn to Asia and the new emerging regional power that is China.

As The People's Republic of China itself emerges from a 30 year period of pseudo-isolation and it attempts to exert more regional influence by taking a more active roll in the economic and geo-political affairs of the Asia. This activism is due in part to two historical factors. The first is its attempt to maintain its internal tranquility (security) by limiting external influences, and the second, closely related to the first, is the attempt to reestablish itself as a regional hegemony by placing itself in positions so as to be able to influence the security, economic, and political affairs of its neighbors – in essence making itself an indispensable part of regional security structure. As China attempts to quell its internal unrest, deal with its neighbors and stretch its political and economic power, the potential for conflict with its mighty neighbors to the south and east, namely India and Japan, and the US appears to be on the increase.

At issue is not that China is becoming more involved in the region, but rather, in the way it has chosen to engage. Recent actions on China's part have raised alarms that it may use any means it sees fit to facilitate its historical regional role. These actions have ranged from the occupation of disputed islands in the South China Sea

and the conduct of highly provocative military exercises off the coast of Taiwan during that island nation's last elections. In addition to military actions outside of its recognized territories, it has not only cruelly repressed its minority ethnic populations, but has also conducted political and religious persecution; pursued espionage operations directed against the United States; and finally, it is suspected of exportation and proliferation of critical military technology. All of these acts have served to increase tensions in the region and have been a catalyst for a significant increase of tensions between the US and China.

The question is why, despite such an unprecedented prospects for peace and cooperation, should Beijing follow a course that could well send it on a collision course with not only its neighbors but, perhaps, the US as well?

GEN Hugh Shelton, CJCS, expressed one point of view as to China's recent actions when he stated that the intent of US foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be to prevent China from becoming the Soviet Union of the next century.<sup>1</sup>

Can China's conduct be really compared with the Soviet Union at the height of its power and aggression? Are China's actions a return to Cold War paradigm or is there something else at work? Now that the Soviet Union is gone, is China assuming the role as the supporter of "peoples revolutions" or is there some other motivation for China's actions – motivations obvious to China but missed by Westerners not familiar with Chinese history or their particular visions of national security requirements?

Evidence and many noted experts, specifically Samuel S. Kim, Michael Swain and others believe that Beijing's actions are nothing more than continued manifestations of what it has sought for the past 2,000 years – namely a strong desire, derived from cultural and historical precedent, to be the pre-eminent power in Asia, and a recognized world power.<sup>2</sup>

The intent of this paper then, is to examine recent events in the region and identify, based on Chinese history and stated national policy goals, potential conflicts that may develop between the PRC and the US as we pursue our growing relationship with China. In order to do so, this paper will explore China's historical national security goals; its recent policy and attempts to maintain internal stability; its recent actions pursuant to its neighbors to the south and the South China Sea, Japan and

finally, to examine potential hot spots in East Asia that could have a direct impact on US-Sino relations.

### **China and National Security – A Historical Perspective**

Before we can discuss the present tensions in Asia as they pertain to China and how it interacts with its neighbors, it is useful to examine the history of China's foreign policy. Doing so may well provide some clues as to China's behavior in today's world and the prospects for the future.

Today, China faces the same national security challenges and implementation policies it has had for the past 2,000 years. These challenges have been a central concern of every Chinese government since the Han Dynasty (206BC – 24AD). The national security imperatives for China are, as they have been in the past - to preserve domestic order and well being, and to deter external threats to China.<sup>3</sup>

In order to achieve those national security goals, Chinese governments, since ancient times, have been required to protect and defend extremely long land frontiers. The ability to protect those borders has been made more difficult by the fact that China has always believed it has faced threats, both domestic and foreign, while hampered by governments that have been organized under what Swain and Tellis refer to as elite leadership, and weak institutions. These factors have made the defense of those borders very difficult. In spite of the first three conditions, these governments have always had an unshakable belief that should be a great power.<sup>4</sup> This belief and actions derived from this belief has made China a competitor with its neighbors. The situation China finds itself in today as it deals with its neighbors, both near and far, is very much reminiscent of the past.

Just as the above has haunted China as it has pursued security, the following four points are also key in the way Beijing approached its strategy to achieve that security. These factors arise from four distinct yet interrelated areas. These internal challenges, like its security goals, have remained fairly constant throughout its history. They are identified below:

- Periodic expansion and contraction of periphery control and regime boundaries, primary as a result of fluctuations in state capacity
- The frequent yet limited use of force against external entities in order to safeguard and guarantee its strategic goals
- A heavy reliance on non-coercive security strategies to control or pacify the periphery when the state was relatively weak and unable to dominate the periphery through military means, or regards the use of force as unnecessary or excessively costly
- A strong, albeit sporadic, susceptibility to the influence of domestic leadership politics, through both the largely idiosyncratic effect of charismatic leaders and elite strife and the more regular influence of recurring leadership debates over autonomy and the use of force.<sup>5</sup>

Given the above, the questions that exist for China today is what are the specific challenges as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

One attempt to answer the questions was made by Michael D. Swain and Ashley Tellis in their recently published analysis of the China's grand strategy. In it, they noted that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Chinese security problems and resulting strategy continues to center on effort to preserve a fragile degree of domestic order and well being as a first priority, and consolidate control over periphery regions as a primary means of internal defense.<sup>6</sup>

Beijing confirmed this when, in their 2000 Defense White Paper recently published in the China Daily, Chinese military strategists wrote

Resisting aggression, curbing armed subversion, and defending sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and security are the primary mission and concern of the government."<sup>7</sup>

The key words here are "curbing armed subversion and defending sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and security..." Clearly Beijing sees internal subversion as a major national security issue and gives it as much emphasis as another nation might

empathize defending its borders. In that light, it is easy to see why Beijing sees internal instability as well as external instability as a national security threat – a threat that must be reduced.

The second point of instability is presented by the event that we, in the West, saw as a great benefit. In 1994, Samuel S. Kim wrote that despite the fact that the fall of the Soviet Union had placed China in a position of security not known by China since its height of imperial power, “Beijing has been acting in a highly provocative manner as it faces its greatest threat.”<sup>8</sup> In the macro sense, why, if such an unparalleled security situation exists, should China act so threatened? More importantly, what does China feel is threatening it?

In attempting to answer the question, Samuel Kim said that China has observed that since “1995, the conspiracy school seems to have gained ascendancy in China’s assessment of the international security environment” and that the stated US policy of engagement is nothing more than a veiled attempt to contain China as it attempts to secure its position in the region and, in fact, the world. In addition, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has identified that both India and Japan, with Japan as the greater threat, are intent on dominating China.<sup>9</sup>

### **China’s World Today: Internal and Peripheral Instability**

For China, internal instability is as great a danger as threat from outside competition. Chinese governments have long understood that domestic tranquility is key to preserving the state and the two are linked – you cannot have one without the other. As such, the Beijing government is challenged in three areas. The first is the ethnic and religious unrest in its western most province; the second is border security required by the formation of new states to the west; and the third, closely related to the second, is an apparent eastward encroachment by the US and NATO from Europe.

As we look back at China’s history of regional conquest – three reasons stand as to why it undertook such actions. The first is that by controlling its neighbors, China was able to eliminate existing or potential threats from threatening its frontiers – create a buffer zone so to speak. The second was that by occupying outlying regions, it

would be able to convince semi-autonomous regions to accept Chinese suzerainty. Last but not least is that by such actions, Chinese governments were able to assert legitimacy over the citizenry.<sup>10</sup>

When the Chinese Communist Party came to power in China in 1949, it did not abandon these policies. In fact, as a recent Rand study pointed out, the PRC has established an unprecedented level of control around its periphery regions. Except for Taiwan where China has so far failed in its attempts to subjugate this island, it has been able to do so in other areas to include include Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang, and to some degree, Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> By bringing these periphery regions back under its control, Beijing has been able to satisfy three reasons for territorial conquest mentioned above; creating a buffer, eliminating potential threats and providing for legitimacy for the central government – in this case, the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>12</sup>

When studying these events, two things become obvious as to why or when Beijing applies military, political or economic means to achieve its goals. The first example is Tibet. Here, China forcefully occupied the region and essentially started a war with India in 1962. This war was fought not so much because of territorial a (boundary) dispute but because India was thought to have too much influence in an area Beijing believed historically belonged to China.<sup>13</sup>

Some analysts might believe that with the subjugation of Tibet and, to some degree, settlement of the India-Sino border dispute, China might feel more secure have not taken into consideration, the issue of the most recent developments in far western provinces of Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. China experts see these regions as potential powder kegs for violent reaction by natives who see Beijing's tight control as "Chinese Imperialism."

The most dangerous of these is Xinjiang. This region contains vast amounts of the natural resources needed to fuel its growing economy. Unfortunately, for Beijing it also is home to a large number of Muslims of various ethno-national origins.

<sup>14</sup>Understanding and realizing the nature of the region and the mineral wealth available, and consistent with the need to dominate the periphery region, Beijing, in a longstanding program, has been encouraging the migration of a large number of Han (ethnic) Chinese into the region (300K per year). The main purpose of which is to

decrease the population in the eastern cities but also increase the number of ethnic Chinese and reduce the proportion number of Uighur muslims. The logic behind this move was that Han Chinese would be more loyal to Beijing thereby providing a certain amount of stability and loyalty to the central government.<sup>15</sup>

In an effort to reap the benefits available from the region, Beijing has spent more then \$1.5 Billion (US) to improve the infrastructure. The challenge for Beijing in this case is that as it has established control in the region, it has also imposed its laws on the Muslim that are against religious teachings - specifically those dealing with number of children allowed per household, as well as the requirement to have the government approve and publish all religious books and other restrictions that go a long way towards antagonizing the native muslims.<sup>16</sup>

Such heavy-handed actions have sparked ethnic unrest and a strong separatist movement in the region. Since 1997, this unrest and separatism has manifested itself by riots, demonstrations, and terrorist action felt as far away as Beijing. In order to reestablish control, the authorities have held a number of public trials and executed an equally large number of Uighurs. In addition, authorities demolished unauthorized mosques because the Muslims were holding unauthorized religious classes. This rioting and instability has not escaped Beijing's attention. In a visit to the region in July 1998, Jiang Zemin reiterated Beijing's long-standing policy to keep all regions of China under an iron grip when he stated:

A stable society and politics are a condition for social and economic progress. The unity of the ethnic groups can be only achieved by firmly opposing national split and safeguarding the country's unification.<sup>17</sup>

Beijing's concern is that people of the ethnic minority in the region will be encouraged to seek independence and will seek outside help in doing it.<sup>18</sup> It is neither an unrealistic nor unfounded fear.

This fear is based on aid to the rebels being provided by three different groups. The first group is by far the most benign. The first is group(s) is not fundamentalist but national groups that support a peaceful settlement of the differences between the natives of the region and the Han immigrants. These groups are legally constituted,

supported, financed and headquartered outside of China. They are made up largely of Xinjiang expatriates who hold some sentimental ties to their home province. These agencies include the East Turkestan National Center – an organization chaired by Reza Berkin, native of the province. He, along with his parents, fled the province in 1957. He and his organization are dedicated to the “universal value of democracy and human rights.”<sup>19</sup> Another such organization is the Unrepresented Nations And Peoples’ Organization (UNOP). This NGO group is based in The Hague and is presently headed by Erkin Alptekin, who, like Berkin, is a native of the region. Like the East Turkestan National Center, UNOP is dedicated to the peaceful resolution to the problems occurring in Xinjiang.<sup>20</sup>

Far more ominous for Beijing is a second group of activists – in this case far more militant in intent and action. Many of these groups are based in Kazakhstan and did not join the East Turkestan National Center because they believe in the use of force. One such group, the East Turkestan National Liberation Front claimed credit for bus bombings, robberies to acquire weapons, ‘prison hijacking’ and a missile base attack. Another such group has styled itself after the Hamas group in Palestine. This group is reputed to be over 2,000 members strong and also advocates the use of violence in Xinjiang.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, also of concern to Beijing is the proximity and common border between Afghanistan, Pakistan and China and the radical fundamentalism wars going on in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is grave concern from Beijing that such sentiments might spill over into Xinjiang.<sup>22</sup>

The second area of possible instability and internal unrest with which China must wrestle is its economy and the economic reform that have been taking place in China – the implementation 4 Modernizations first laid out by Zhoe Enlai in 1975.<sup>23</sup>

Beijing has long recognized that in order to claim its position as the regional pre-eminent power and even a world power, its economy must be able to compete with those of its neighbors – namely Japan, South Korea, Singapore and even Taiwan.

Part of the reason Chinese leaders have seen the need for economic reform stems from the obvious inability of a command directed economy – that is, a centrally directed and controlled economy; better said, the Soviet Union, to provide for its

people and compete as an equal on the world stage. Essentially, the central government needs a robust economy capable of competing with neighboring free market nations while it continues to provide the services and security its population has grown to expect from its government. Chinese leaders do not want to go the way of the Soviet Government or face the same unrest Russia is facing today.<sup>24</sup>

In attempting to revamp its economy, Beijing is faced with a dilemma. It, no doubt, witnessed the painful process that the Russian economy suffered and continues to suffer as it attempts to move forward to a functioning market economy. Keeping in mind the promises and expectations of its people and its need to maintain its legitimacy, Beijing has chosen a slightly different path to follow as it moves to a more robust and competitive economy.

As it moves on a new path, Beijing has actually put a plan in place to help its transition. This is a five step plan designed to not only move the central government away from overt control of the economy but also a means by which the populace's welfare will be accounted for to help provide a cushion as the economy moves forward. The plan is outlined below.

- The PRC will invest in social security system to help provide for that cushion. This will require capital in order to work.
- Foreign insurance companies are being encouraged to provide investment opportunities to Chinese
- The central government is working to initiate a workable tax system. These taxes include value added taxes, a corporate tax and a process to share tax revenues between local and the central government.
- The central bank is being strengthened to be independent
- Private banks are being introduced and other state owned are being relieved of their mandated lending activities.<sup>25</sup>

From Beijing and the average Chinese perspective, this venture is seen as unsettling. Not only is China going into uncharted territory but the government is doing so while realizing the need to ensure the well being (by Chinese standard) of its

people. This will require the creation of bureaucracies and institutions that up to now have not been part of Chinese life.<sup>26</sup>

The danger that Beijing sees is that reforms are expensive and in order to bring them into effect, Beijing needs foreign capital. It needs to belong to WTO, IMF and it feels it needs PNTR from the US. Conversely, those in control of those organizations want China to reform quickly. Interestingly enough, those sentiments were expressed by the likes of GEN Hugh Shelton, CJCS, when in a recent speech; he stated "...China is developing a market economy with a central planning and execution method...a contradiction in terms. This is dangerous for internal stability."<sup>27</sup> His observation, taken from a purely western perspective might make sense but seen from Beijing's view can only be seen as a lack of understanding of Beijing's problems.

Such sentiments clearly cannot be well received in Beijing and, if we follow their propensity for disliking interference in what they see as their internal affairs – can only stand to continue raising the tensions between Beijing and Washington DC. Clearly, on this one, China is on the right track. The US and its economic partners must be patient and provide help in order to help China enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century correctly. We must also be cautious and, again, understand that Beijing will only do what is good for Beijing and do so on its own good time.

We then go back to the original questions posed at the beginning of this section. Why is the central government so concerned with perceived US hegemony in the region? The answer lies, I think in two specific areas.

The first is the unstable environment created by the disintegration of the USSR. As already discussed, the disintegration of the Soviet Union created instability in its former sphere of influence – namely the former Warsaw Pact nations. Beijing has looked at the events in Eastern Europe and fully realizes that the root causes of problems in areas like the former Yugoslavia is the disintegration of control that the former superpower imposed on it.<sup>28</sup> The same breakup that caused problems in Eastern Europe has also created potential problems on China's own northwest frontier. With the decline and fall of the USSR came the loosening of control over the former republics. What had heretofore been states controlled by one central

government are now independent countries – countries with their own problems, problems which Beijing does not want to see imported within its own borders.

In order to secure these borders, China pursued and eventually secured treaties with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. These treaties called for mutual reduction of military forces on respective borders. In addition to the above treaty, Beijing also signed the Sino-Mongolian Agreement on Co-operations in frontier defense in November 1999.<sup>29</sup>

Surprisingly enough however, for Beijing, the second and most worrisome factor is NATO actions and expansive plans and, more to the point, the US reaction to the way the minorities are being treated. Beijing sees strong similarities between events that led to actions taken by NATO /US in Bosnia and Kosovo and what they are trying to do in Xinjiang, specifically when it comes to repopulating the region with ethnic Han and suppressing Muslim minorities.<sup>30</sup>

The possibilities have caused China to significantly increase its military presence in the region. This presence have included significant military exercises designed to not only increase readiness of Chinese Forces but also signal internal rebel forces and outside forces that China is not only willing but able to protect what it clearly considers internal Chinese territory and business.

Why is this so important to the Chinese and what are the concerns with the US and NATO? Again we return to the perception that the US is attempting to contain China's expansion of influence on the Asian land mass. This perception is seen as very real when taken in light of the Kosovo Intervention and the reasons given for it.

Chinese leaders see the encroachment of NATO eastward to include more and more of the former Warsaw Pact nations and the recent military exercises such as CENTRAZBAT '98 as sure signs of Western (US) moves in Eastern Europe/Western Asia. These moves eastward combined with NATO/US involvement in Bosnia and Kosovo, involvement that China sees as meddling in internal affairs of sovereign states and in direct opposition to what Beijing sees as intensely dangerous for China.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Beijing as Beijing surveys both the internal situation and the periphery, it senses that the situation is unstable. If it follows its own model, it must clamp down

to reestablish order – this it is attempting to do. Only by so doing will it maintain its authority to rule.

### **Present Geopolitical Realities - External Challenges**

Just as the dissolution of the USSR and the subsequent creation of independent republics on its borders presented China with new national security challenges, so too has it changed the international geo-political arena and the way China deals with its competitors and neighbors. These challenges are manifested in four general areas. The first is the fact that China has lost its prior position of counter balance between the US and its former adversary thus leaving the US unfettered as it pursues its own vision of the post cold war world; the second is how it deals with India – an old adversary; the third is how it deals with its chief competitor in the region – namely Japan; and of course the fourth is how does it see the US and how will it deal with it as China pursues its national security goals?

First, the loss of the great enemy and the impact on China's role as a power broker. Why has China chosen this time to assume its position a world leader? The reasons are in fact because, in their view, it is needed to reestablish a balance against the US as the only remaining superpower and a direct competitor in Asia against China.

China has, historically sought and achieved a better position of power playing a balance of power role. That is, acting as the balance between two blocks. This concept certainly fitted nicely in its concept of multi-polar world politics.

From the 1960s to the late 1980s, it played this role extremely well pitting the US against the USSR, and from its position, gained some unexpected power as it pursued its own security goals.<sup>32</sup> In the security model established by conflict between the two super powers, a non-aligned nation such as China was one that would clearly place a nation in what has been pejoratively termed as "Third World." In that role, China played a quiet but significant part. Essentially it belonged in no one's camp. It was a nation pursuing its own policies for its own reasons. As the US and the USSR faced each other, China, wooed by both sides when it was convenient and ignored by

either side for the same reason, was able to follow its own path as it pursued its national security objectives. This unique position allowed China to secure its inner borders, bring semi-independent regions under Beijing's iron fist (Tibet) and, use its position as arbiter to garner favorable concessions from one player or the other (get US to agree to oust Taipei from its UN seat).

Now China is faced with a new order. Whatever source we read, it is clear that China does not see the present geopolitical situation in Asia as a good thing for its own security needs. With the United States as the sole remaining superpower, Japan as a regional economic power house in the east, and India as a powerful military nation with an axe to grind on its southern border, China sees itself as surrounded on all sides with unfriendly competitors and potential enemies.

The question for Beijing then, is who is the greater threat? Here, there seems to be disagreement amongst the Chinese intelligencia as to who is a most dangerous potential foe. Depending on who one reads, either the military voice as heard in the defense white paper, political and social scientists who recently released reports printed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), or political leaders, we might get a different picture altogether as to who China really regards as its true enemy.

To determine this for ourselves, it might be useful to look at the nature of the continuing conflicts between all parties.

First – India. Dr. Pillsbury writes that “Chinese assessments of India's future development stress its dangerous military potential and the instability of its democracy.” In fact, Pillsbury reports that Chinese authors believe that because it is so unstable, it remains the preeminent military threat<sup>0</sup>, a threat no doubt antagonized by the results of the 1962 Sino-Indian War.<sup>33</sup> Since that time, relations have not been warm and both nations look at each other with suspicion despite the establishment of the Line of Actual Control – the new border between China and India in the disputed area. In fact, the relationship between the two nations can only be termed a dichotomy. On the one hand, China sees use in having a rapprochement with India as the former attempts to consolidate its influence over Asia, while on the other hand; it attempts to marginalize India's own efforts to become the leader of Asia. China sees

this competition of effort as a direct attack on its 3<sup>rd</sup> imperative and thus foresees a future reckoning as unavoidable.<sup>34</sup>

As we look at the nature of the Sino-Indian competition, we see a good example of China's stated need to control both its periphery region and the need to identify itself as a great power. As we do so, we see that India directly challenges China in both arenas.

As discussed previously, China has considered control of its periphery regions as critical to defending its internal territories and by extension its self-image. As such, many analysts and regional experts attribute the original Sino-Indian War in to two events. The first was the occupation of Tibet by China in 1959. The annexation of Tibet had the effect of erasing the buffer zone that existed between China and India thus putting the two countries in direct competition for disputed boundaries.<sup>35</sup> The second catalyst to the war was not so much the incorrect interpretation of the McMahon Line established in 1914 but in fact, the war was due to the perceived India interference in what was a now clearly internal Chinese affair. The perceived interference was of course, aggravated when India granted asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959.<sup>36</sup> As already discussed, interference in internal affairs by outside influences cannot be tolerated.

As discussed above, China's relationship with India, in terms of China's position as the preeminent power in Asia, is like everything else it does – a study in contrast. While China believes India is ambitious, military strong and, in fact a direct competitor as the former attempts to establish itself as the preeminent power in Asia, it believes India will be useful to offset US policies in Asia. China is ready to accept India as a junior partner but only on a limited basis.<sup>37</sup>

As events progress however, tensions between the two nations continue to mount for two reasons. The first is that China sees India as its only rival with the military and economic capability to challenge its attempt to become the preeminent power in Asia. This rivalry is also based in part by the Indian attempt to increase the number of nations that sit as permanent member of the UN Security Council – a position China guards jealously.<sup>38</sup> China sees this position as the sole spokesman for Asia affairs and by extension, the leader of that block.

In its attempt to counter India's desire to expand its own markets and influence in area, China has also expended much resource in trying to contain Indian attempts. China has targeted India's two opponents for special attention – Pakistan and Burma. When dealing with Burma, China has recently taken advantage of the vacuum left when India refused to recognize the revolutionary government in Myanmar. China immediately recognized the government and has given it more than US\$1.4 billion in military aid. These aid packages have translated in a modernization of Burmese military forces – forces Burma has deployed along the common border with India.<sup>39</sup> This deployment has prompted a response from India in the guise of an increase in its own forces along the common frontier. A move that can only satisfy China as those forces can no longer be readily used against China. A value added bonus to closer ties with Burma may be the reopening of the old Burma Road. Reopening this road could provide easier access to China's interior regions. This, along with expanded rail links to Indochina would help provinces like the Yunnan province export its goods.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the help China has provided Burma, it is also directly involved with helping Pakistan with its own nuclear program. China sees Pakistan's program as a counter balance to India's own nuclear program which is not aimed at Pakistan but instead is aimed at China to prevent what it did in 1962 – conduct a war of aggression against India.<sup>41</sup>

China is not the only of the two that attempt to court the others enemy. India is presently courting Vietnam – one of China's long time enemies. India is also attempting to establish closer ties to ASEAN nations. Whatever the outcome of the competition between the two emerging powers, analysts agree that, whether because of its improvement in military technology or its growing economic strength, or perhaps because of its stated anti-American hegemonic stance, many ASEAN nations are treating China with the deference it believes it deserves.<sup>42</sup>

Next is Japan – clearly the nation with the greatest potential to challenge China as regional hegemon, and given the historical enmity between the two nations, gives pause to how China sees its neighbor to the northeast. Many of the same authors and political scientist who believe India is a major military threat, also see Japan as a threat in the coming decades. According to Dr. Pillsbury, many of those individuals

see Japan's goal as reaching economic and military preeminence by 2020. In addition, many of those same individuals see Japan as attempting to hold China up as the major threat so that the US focuses its attention on containing it, therefore allowing Japan to gain ground economically and militarily, this includes nuclear as well as conventional power.<sup>43</sup> In fact, as we look at the relation between these two nations, feelings of enmity between these two seems to have increased rather than reduced over the past few years. Causes for this increase have ranged from the nuclear testing by China to the argument between the two over war reparations versus financial for China. In addition, China, somewhat insensitively broadcasted decidedly anti Japanese news releases during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the end of WWII.<sup>44</sup>

Do the Chinese authors have merit in their estimations of Japanese and Indian intentions? Given the long-standing and uneasy peace between India and China vis-à-vis the 1962 Sino-Indian war, there may be basis to the idea that India does not want China in a position of preeminence in Asia – certainly not militarily anyway. That is certainly why it is pursuing allies to help offset China's own moves in Myanmar and other nations to help put it in positions to dictate terms to India. Such a policy is not valid when it comes to Japan however. It is hard to believe, given Japan's long standing policy towards military forces in general and nuclear arms specifically that Japan should or would pursue such a course. There is no question that Japan wishes to pursue an economic plan that will make it strong – any market economy needs growth to sustain itself, but not for the purpose that Chinese scholars seem to think.

Finally, China's relationship with the United States. Unlike the mixed signals and actions towards its other Asian neighbors, Chinese military authorities see the US as China's greatest rival. Three main reasons are given to support why China sees US interests as clearly dangerous to its aspirations. The first is, of course, the fact that the US is the only remaining superpower with economic and military partners in Asia. The second, perhaps far more ominous for China, is that the US may pursue potential deployment of a national missile defense system (NMD). Such a system would completely overpower China's one hope of military equality with the US by rendering

its small fleet of ICBMs obsolete. The third potential conflict is over Taiwan and Korea.

First, the US as the sole remaining superpower. Because the US is operating unfettered - that is, it isn't counter-balanced by another world power, it has been able to pursue its own policies as and where it sees fit with relative impunity. Chinese military thinkers, writing in the White Paper on Defense, have used the US action in Kosovo as evidence that the US will use military force to hamper other sovereign nations from pursuing their own vital interests. Beijing sees this, along with the apparent effort to increase its own influence eastward into the Central Asian republics as a US attempt to hamper China as it pursues its own national security goals; guaranteeing its sovereignty - a right that Beijing jealously guards. From the Chinese viewpoint, this pursuit is not only reasonable but it is its historical right.

The second reason and perhaps far more ominous for China, is that the US may pursue potential deployment of a national missile defense system (NMD). Such a system would completely overpower China's one hope of military equality with the US by rendering its small fleet of ICBMs obsolete.

The third potential conflict is over Taiwan and Korea. In the Defense White Paper, Chinese military planners write that:

...and the US will practice a strategy of destruction against NK - the last Stalinist regime in the world. Such US strategy poses not only an ideological challenge but, more significantly, a strategic threat as China regards the Korean region as an important buffer zone between China and the US.<sup>45</sup>

This statement along with the following paragraph about Taiwan clearly shows the potential for conflict:

Settlement of the Taiwan issue and realization of the Complete reunification of China embodies the fundamental interest of the Chinese nation.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, China's prospect for peace and continued prosperity depends on its ability to rectify its own national security needs with those of its neighbors. The

problem is that its own vision can sometimes blind it to other nation's concern's. An example of this is the way it has handled territorial disputes within the region.

### **China and the South China Seas – A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing**

The position China has taken when dealing with its internal security issues and when dealing with its immediate neighbors can certainly be justified a strictly internal matters and bilateral relations between two sovereign nations – especially since the US seems to have lost interest in the South Asian affairs.

The same cannot be said, however, for what appears to be imperialistic intentions in the South China Sea – specifically the Spratlys and the Parcel Island groups. Studying China's actions and methods in that area might prove useful at looking at its preferred method for implementing its national security goals.

These islands, claimed by China and many other Southeast Asia nations have been the focus in recent military actions by Beijing. Herein lies the problem. By occupying these islands, China not only risks confrontation with these neighbors but also with the United States as this may affect US strategic positioning.

In rebuilding its military forces, one of China's major goals has been to build a force projection capability – especially the capability a blue-water navy would provide it. This capability is indispensable considering China's recent interests in the South China Sea.<sup>47</sup> This interest manifested itself, when, in 1995, China with no warning, invaded and occupied the appropriately named Mischief Reef – an island in the disputed Spratly Island group. This area is well within Manila's internationally recognized exclusion zone. Apparently, Beijing felt no hesitation in its need to undertake this risky action. The question remains why? There may well be three interrelated reasons for this action. The first is that Beijing considers these islands Chinese territory. If one is to believe that the Chinese policy of securing outlying territories for internal security, its easy to see why China felt compelled, rightly or wrongly to occupy this region. This logic is rather ominous since Chinese maritime territory measures over 1,000,000 kilometers encompassing over 30 major islands – some of them disputed and strategic territory that include Brunei, Malaysia, the

Philippines and even Vietnam.<sup>48</sup> If one is to assume that China's policy of securing its outlying regions, then it stands to reason that it would take such actions in order to actions in order to formalize its relationship with these regions – just as it did with Tibet and Xinjiang. The second reason given was that presented with a fait accompli, and no military power with which to challenge China's overt act, there was nothing the Philippines could do. Certainly a calculated risk but obviously one in which Beijing felt, correctly, that it would prevail.<sup>49</sup>

The third reason why China is pursuing this dangerous course of action is more ominous and in many ways, similar in reasoning to its present relationship and actions towards India – that is, to establish itself as the regionally imminent power. This time, however, it is challenging the United States and the other economic powers in the region. The Spratlys and the Paracels straddle the sea lanes vital to the Asia-Pacific states. Clearly, the state that controls these strategically important waterways controls the economic welfare of the neighboring states. By controlling the islands and having the blue water navy to enforce its policies, Beijing is gaining position to control its neighbors and achieve its goal of regional pre-eminence.<sup>50</sup>

In his essay entitled Slow-Intensity Conflict in the South China Sea, Dr Andrew Scobell clearly illustrates China's method of gaining what it wants when he writes

But China clearly understood the advantage of slow intensity conflict. Although Beijing claims to seek negotiated solutions to the disputes and advocates joint exploitation to the regions natural resource.....it appears to be attempting to lull the other claimants into believing that no conflict exists.<sup>51</sup>

This is a most dangerous method as at some point, China may well try it against a nation that is not willing to let China have its way.

### **The Dragon and Prospects for Future Stability**

So what are the prospects for future stability in Asia?

As China moves forward with its attempt to consolidate its position as the preeminent power in Asia, it is confronted by the new realities of other nations

emerging as regional power competitors – nations such as India, Japan, South Korea, and even Taiwan. These nations are not only economic powers but emerging military powers as well and have great potential to challenge China as it quests to become the preeminent Asian power. At the same time, some element of Beijing's four-pronged approach to security has tremendous potential for placing it on a collision course with, if not the U.S. directly, then certainly with one or more allies which might well have the same effect – worsening relations with the US.

The evidence seems clear that Beijing is pursuing a four fold course of action it deems not only preferable but, in Beijing's view, one that is in China's best interest – as such, they are not likely to change. Some elements of this course of action – namely the massive repression of its minorities in its far northwest province; exportation and, in fact, proliferation of nuclear technology; aid to selected nations designed to isolate its potential rivals, India; and overt military action where potential for counteraction is unlikely, are all designed to suppress potential challenges as China attempts to emerge as the pre-eminent military and economic power in the region.

As the US and other regional powers cast a weary eye towards Chinese actions and motivation, we see alarming trends as Beijing imposes seemingly harsh measures to repress ethnic Uighur in Xinjiang; or as it represses reform minded political groups; or Beijing's rather Machiavellian method of dealing with India; as well as diplomatic bellicosity as in the area of reparations versus aid from Japan; or even from Beijing's perspective, its appropriate invasion of disputed territory, we are reminded of the old Soviet Union as it attempted to spread Marxism-Leninism. Believing that this is China's intention in Asia is somewhat short sighted and reflects a poor, and if fact, dangerous misunderstanding of Beijing's policies as it could lead to further complications in developing appropriate courses of actions when dealing with China.

Indeed, we westerners must understand that as it has already done, Beijing looks on its national security strategy with a long-term vision – a vision that has existed relatively unchanged for over 2000 years. That vision is a long-term regional stability that is favorable to China. The problem is that its very effort to create that

stability has a great deal of potential to create instability. For example, by suppressing its minorities in Xinjiang, it is encouraging Muslim separatist factions to fight against the regime thus creating even more friction and animosity towards Beijing by the native tribesmen. By conducting offensive operations in the same region, and in fact, conducting incursion flight into neighboring sovereign airspace, it is creating an atmosphere of tension between it and its neighbors – thus inviting, if not NATO exercises, then certainly US bilateral exercises and rapprochement – especially given China's already demonstrated potential for invading disputed periphery areas. This has the potential to invite an unwanted adversary even closer to its borders. An equally serious danger to regional stability is Beijing's relations with India. By exporting nuclear technology to Pakistan, Beijing is encouraging India to build alliances with other regional powers such as Vietnam. This continuing one-upmanship in establishing mini spheres within a region in which it wants to be the hegemony causes conflicts and a feeling of mutual mistrust between the two nations.

How then, should the US and its regional allies approach Beijing's behavior? The answer simply is it depends on how our allies and we see China's intentions and develop courses of action that deal with the China we believe is emerging. These are two very different courses.

The first is a China's that is described by GEN Shelton – that is, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century version of the Soviet Union. If China's present actions in the region are a precursor to an expansionist and, in fact, imperialistic view with Beijing being an aggressor, then we have no choice but to develop a containment policy designed to prevent China from becoming the imperial power it has set its mind to become. This would mean we would have to continue eastward expansion of NATO or at least continued military to military and PFP contacts in Central Asia. It would also mean we would have to support the Philippines and other nations in their disagreement with China over the Spratley Islands. It means we would have no choice but to actively engage in operations to counter any initiatives over Taiwan that would be advantageous to Beijing. In addition, we would have to actively discourage any attempts to reunify Korea as China would probably insist on the eventual withdrawal of US forces as a

precondition to reunification thus reducing our ability to project power into the region – that is serve as a counterbalance to a powerful China.

On the other hand, if we understand that China's present courses of action stem from a historical national security perspective and a unique view of the world around it and is not attempting to export its form of government, then an entirely different course of action is called for. This course must be one in which we encourage reform but do not meddle in its internal attempts to reform. We must then undertake a course of action that would assuage its traditional xenophobic outlook on its neighbors by taking care not to hem it in but instead accept the fact that China has the right, as does every nation, to its own sphere. We must engage it, and encourage it to continue its reforms. We must also recognize that China is trying to reform itself – albeit perhaps not with the speed that we would like it to see but with a speed deemed acceptable to its leaders to ensure that its population doesn't suffer as the Russians did and are continuing to as a result of misguided plans to force reform too soon. This all nations should support and help.

I, for one, believe the latter rather than the former course of action should be followed.

In either case, one aspect of China's behavior cannot be accepted – this is its adventurism in the South China Sea. Beijing must be confronted and made to understand, by an international body, that such actions go against the accepted community of nations practices and that such actions will be punished. Failure to do so will only encourage its leaders to continue the annexation of territories and disputed areas which it sees as either rightfully belonging to it or, through other means, bringing countries it sees as helpful under its influence.

In all we do, either unilaterally or bilaterally, we must understand why China pursues this course of action and in all likelihood will continue to pursue it until, if ever, it satisfies its own definition of national security and its self-image.

Word Count – 8256

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p17

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 9

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pps. 10-20

<sup>7</sup> "White Paper on Defense Policies," China Daily, October 17, 2000, Available from <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndydb/2000/10/d1-6re~1.a17.html> . Internet. Accessed 31 October 2000, p4

<sup>8</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era, Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1994. P1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p 11

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 15

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pgs 35, 64, 75

<sup>12</sup> Kim, p33

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 39

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.1

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan S. Landreth, China's Wild West: The Promise and the Danger of Xinjiang, March 04, 2000, <http://virtualchina.com/trade/tviews/010400-tv.htm> , accessed on the Internet on 12/19/2000, p.1

<sup>16</sup> B. Raman, "Continuing Unrest in Xinjiang", South Asia Analysis Group, March 14, 1999, <[http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl\\_rpt/uygr/ugr19990314.htm](http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl_rpt/uygr/ugr19990314.htm)> , accessed on the internet on 12/2000, p.1-2

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.3-5

<sup>18</sup> Kim, p.33

<sup>19</sup> Cao Chang-Qing, "The General Looks to the World for Help", Taipei Time, 10-11-99, China Civil War—Xinjiang Rebels –Violent and Non-Violent Resistance to Communist Rule, <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a380248823es5.htm> , accessed on internet 12/19/00, p.3

<sup>20</sup> R. Raman, "Continuing Unrest in Xinjiang", South Asia Analysis Group, March 14, 1999, <[http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl\\_rpt/uygr/ugr19990314.htm](http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl_rpt/uygr/ugr19990314.htm)> , accessed on the internet on 12/2000 p. 4

<sup>21</sup> Cao, chang-Qing, p.3

<sup>22</sup> R. Raman, p.6

<sup>23</sup> Alfred D. Wilhelm, China and Security in the Asian Pacific Region Through 2010, Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council of the United States, 1997, p. 19

<sup>24</sup> Kim, p.3

<sup>25</sup> Wilhelm, p. 25

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.26

<sup>27</sup> GEN Shelton

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 10

<sup>29</sup> White Paper on Defense Policies" pp 22 - 24

<sup>30</sup> "Beijing Prepares for a New War Front in Xinjiang", Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy, October 2000, pp4-6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>32</sup> Mohan J. Malik,: "India's Relations with China Post-Soviet Union: Less Cooperation, More Competition," China as a Great Power: Myths, Realities, and Challenges in the Asia Pacific Region, Harris, Stuart, and Klintworth, Gary. Eds, St Martins Press, New York, 1995, p 138 0

<sup>33</sup> Pillsbury, Michael, China Debated the Future Security Environment, Washington DC, National Defense University, 2000, p. 138 -143.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 133

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 140

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<sup>40</sup> Mohan, p. 148 - 149

<sup>41</sup> Brigadier Singh, Vijay k., Indian Army. Interviewed by author, 30 November 2000, Carlisle Barracks PA.

<sup>42</sup> Malik J. Mohan, p. 172

<sup>43</sup> Pillsbury, pg 1

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Bessho, pg 34

<sup>46</sup> White Paper on Defense Policies, pg 24

<sup>47</sup> Kim, pgs 1-2

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pg 12,15

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

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